

At a glance:

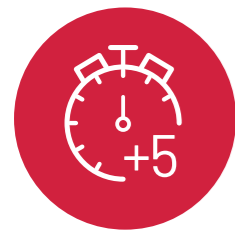
Active schools and kura

Research shows that physical activity can lift ākonga engagement, attendance, achievement and wellbeing.

This resource shares evidence-based, practical approaches you can take to ensure every ākonga has quality opportunities to be active.

The evidence shows physical activity:

- 1 Enhances academic achievement
- 2 Boosts brain function and cognition
- 3 Improves engagement and attendance
- 4 Supports mental health and wellbeing



5 hours

of increased on-task time per week can be achieved by integrating physical activity into classroom time.



97.5%

of survey respondents (principals, teachers and curriculum leaders) in a New Zealand study believed that education outside the classroom improved student engagement.



4 months

of additional learning gains in spelling and maths can be achieved when physical activity is integrated into students' learning.



56%

of students who continued sport participation from childhood to adolescence had lower odds of absenteeism.



5 minutes

of being active in nature can boost mental wellbeing.

Active Bodies, Active Minds report. The Value of Blue and Green Spaces report.

Positive trends

- Ākonga activity levels are recovering post-pandemic.
- Being active helps ākonga feel happier, more included and connected at school.
- Māori and Pacific ākonga are among the most active.
- Being active with friends and competitive sport are 2 of the main ways ākonga enjoy physical activity.

Considerations

- Only a third of ākonga are very satisfied with their physical activity at school.
- Ākonga want better facilities, more activity options and improved uniforms.
- Older ākonga report "being too busy" to be active and confidence drops as they move into senior years.
- Girls face more social and confidence related barriers to being active than boys.
- Disabled ākonga and some ethnic groups, such as Asian young people, are less active and face more challenges to be active.

Active NZ Survey 2024/25, Voice of Rangatahi 2025

What school leaders can do

1 Champion physical activity

- Ensure quality physical activity and wellbeing are prioritised within your school's strategic planning, timetables and resourcing. Prioritise sport, PE, break-time activity and education outside the classroom.
- Create a welcoming, inclusive environment for all ākonga to be active.

2 Build connection to spaces and places

- Design and prioritise physical activities that connect ākonga to culture, whakapapa, te taiao and pūrākau.
- Use local blue and green spaces like rivers, bush and parks to support physical and mental wellbeing, cognitive development and cultural connection.
- Consider opening school facilities to whānau and the community before and after school.

3 Help grow confidence and belonging

- Offer inclusive, low-pressure, fun, whole-school events to help ākonga build confidence and feel like they belong.
- Involve ākonga in designing sports days, school camps and other activities. Establish a physical activity ākonga leadership group.

“ Our philosophy in relation to sport is that there should be a level at which every student can participate and enjoy themselves. ”

Tumuaki

“ As Māori people, we have a strong spiritual and physical connection to the water. Waka Ama and surfing get us out there and in the taiao. ”

Kaiako

“ I didn't want to come at first because I thought it was just sports. But when I realised there would be singing, I came and ended up enjoying some sports too. It was fun, a win-win. ”

Rangatahi

4 Break down barriers

- Reduce cost, access and equipment barriers through subsidies, gear libraries, transport support and local partnerships.
- Use local blue and green spaces for easy to access, low-cost activity options that also support wellbeing.

5 Celebrate school values through sport

- Reinforce school values when sharing sport successes in newsletters and on social media.
- Celebrate ākonga who demonstrate positive behaviours on and off the field.

6 Measure what matters

- Track participation across co-curricular activities and its link to engagement, achievement and attendance.
- Use research and your own school-level data to understand impact, identify gaps and guide future decisions and investment in physical activity initiatives.

Insights from a programme in schools and kura

Active As is a Sport NZ programme that supports secondary schools and wharekura to provide positive, student-led and inclusive active recreation and sport opportunities for ākonga.

Evaluation shows ākonga who take part in the programme are more:

- active during the school day
- confident to participate and have a stronger sense of belonging at their school or kura
- engaged in learning, feel happier about going to school and have improved attendance.

“ I think it's great that we get our own choices to do what we want to do...it's just a great way to express ourselves. ”

Student leader

“ Physically active students learn better. It brings positive impact on attendance and that connection between students and teachers, but also students feeling connected to the school. ”

Assistant Tumuaki

Take the next step

Explore these reports, resources and case studies to help strengthen your school's approach to movement, engagement, attendance and wellbeing.

Research

[Active Bodies, Active Minds report](#)

[Voice of Rangatahi 2025](#)

[Student Voice report 2025](#)

[Active NZ Survey 2024/25 results](#)

[The Value of Blue and Green Spaces report](#)

Resources

[Reviewing your school's physical activity approach](#)

[MoveWell](#)

[Increasing Community Access to Schools Toolkit](#)

Case studies

[Redefining physical activity - Te Aute College](#)

[Initiative gets rangatahi moving - Māngere College](#)

[Ākonga reflection: Girls' participation in sport and PE - Mana College](#)

[Strengthening connections to culture, community and te taiao - Tolaga Bay Area School](#)



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